

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 AID-05 OMB-01 NIC-01 AGR-05

SCCT-01 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 L-02 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ARAE-00 /080 W

----- 020283

R 032147Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY LIMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3744

CONFIDENTIAL LIMA 0907

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, PE

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT VELASCO'S JAN 29 PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: LIMA 809, 814, 849, 893.

1. ON JANUARY 29 PRESIDENT VELASCO HELD AN EXTRAORDINARY 4-1/2 HOUR PRESS CONFERENCE. IN APPARENTLY EXCEPTIONAL FORM, VELASCO WAS LUCID, QUICK, EARTY, INDEED VULGAR AND OUTRAGEOUS AT TIMES. WORN OUT NEWSMEN LEFT THE SESSION WITH FEW DOUBTS CONCERNING VELASCO'S HEALTH. HE COMMENTED ON A WIDE RANGE OF FOREIGN (SEE REFTELS) ASN INTERNAL ISSUES. THERE FOLLOWS HIGHLIGHTS FROM HIS DOMESTIC STATEMENTS BASED PRIMARILY ON THE TAPED LIVE VERSION RATHER THAN THE DRASTICALLY EDITED OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT AND COMMENTARY.

2. VELASCO'S HEALTH. THE WEEK PRECEDING THE PRESS CONFERENCE, VELASCO WAS ABSENT FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE, SECLUDED AT A NEARBY BEACH HOUSE. RUMORS ABOUNDED IN LIMA CONCERNING VELEASCO'S HEALTH AND WHEREABOUTS. THEN VELASCO EMERGED FROM HIS HIDEAWAY, AND HELD THE LONGEST PRESS CONFERENCE OF HIS PRESIDENCY. HE CHIDED THE NEWSMEN FOR CREATING SUCH A SCANDAL ABOUT HIS HEALTH, STATING THAT HE SIMPLY TOOK A BRIEF VACATION.

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3. MOVIMIENTO LABOR ROVOLUCIONARIO (MLR): SEVERAL QUESTIONS DEALT WITH THE CONTROVERSIAL, MILITANTLY ANTI-PERUVIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCP) MLR. (FOUNDED BY THE PRO-GOVERNMENT FISHERMENS UNION IN 1972, MLR HAS RECENTLY CHALLENGED COMMUNIST CONTROL OF THE MARCONA MINE WORKDERS. IN ADDITION, THIS PAST FORTNIGHT, THE LEADERSHIP OF THE GOVERNMENT'S LABOR CENTRAL, HAS OPENLY IDENTIFIED ITSELF WITH THE MLR, AND SINAMOS CHIEF, GENERAL SALA HAS MET WITH THE MLR, WELCOMING THEIR BACKING. PRO-COMMUNIST EXPRESO HAS REACTED SHRILLY AGAINST THE MLR.) VELASCO RECALLED THAT THE MLR WAS CREATED IN THE PORT OF CHIMBOTE BY TOUGH PEOPLE WHO RESOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS WITH FISTS AND NOT BY WAVING HANDERCHIEFS (AS APRISTAS DO). HE SAID THE MLR SUPPORTS THE REVOLUTION, WHICH THEREFORE CANNOT REFUSE MLR FRIENDSHIP REGARDLESS OF PCP CHARGES THAT THE GROUP IS FASCIST. (COMMENT: VELASCO IN EFFECT GAVE THE GREEN LIGHT TO THE MLR, MUCH TO THE DISCOMFITURE OF THE PCP, WHICH PROBABLY FEARS THAT THE MLR IS A "BROWN SHIRT" ATTEMPT TO DIVIDE THE UNIONS AND MAY EVEN BE THE PRECURSOR OF A GOP POLITICAL PARTY. VELEASCO MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE WOULD NO MORE RENOUNCE MLR SUPPORT THAN HE WOULD PCP BACKING).

3. THE REVOLUTION: JOURNALISTS TRIED TO PIN VELASCO DOWN CONCERNING THE REVOLUTION'S PHILOSOPHY BUT THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE WOULD NOT ENGAGE IN BLAH-BLAH-BLAH. HE STRESSED THAT THAT THE ARMY'S PHILOSOPHY WAS NATIONALISTIC AND INDEPENDENT, AND THAT THE REVOLUTION WOULD NOT BECOME BEHOLDEN TO POLITICAL PARTY AND NEWSPAPER LORDS AS GOVERNMENTS HAD IN THE PAST. AT ONE POINT, A CORRESPONDENT SAID THAT SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE ABOUT ECONOMIC SABOTAGE, SUCH AS THE BURNING OF SUGAR CANE FIELDS (AT CAYALTI) OR ARSON AT EPSA WAREHOUSES (AS APPARENTLY HAPPENED AT PEURA). THE NESMWAN PROPOSED PASSAGE OF A LAW SIMILAR TO THE DRASIC STATUTE AGAINST TERRORISM. VELASCO TOLD THE NEWSMAN: SO WHAT, THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN SOME SABOTAGE; WE WILL NOT ENGAGE IN VIOLENCE; OURS IS A PEACEFUL REVOLUTION. IN A ANSWER TO A QUESTION CONCERNING THE EPSA INVESTIGATION AND TERRORISM, BELASCO REFUSED TO COMMENT, NOTING THE PROBLEMS WERE BEING HANDLED BY THE COURTS AND POLICE. DISCUSSING THE "SECTORIZED PRESS", THE PRESIDENT INSISTED THAT THE NEWSPAPERS WILL BE TURNED OVER TO THE COAMPESINOS, LABOR GROUPS AND OTHERS ON SCHEDULE, I.E. JULY 1975. AN ARGENTINE CORRESPONDENT TOLD VELASCO THAT ALLENDE

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FELL BECAUSE HE IGNORED THE MIDDLE CLASS. VELASCO RESPONDED THAT WHEN HE CAME TO POWER, PERU WAS SICK AND THAT THE REMEDY HAD TO BE APPLIED TO THE FORGOTTEN MAJORITIES. FURTHERMORE, VELASCO CONTENDED (WITH TRUTH) THAT THE MIDDLE CLASS IS NOT SUFFERING THAT MUCH. HE INSISTED THAT THE REVOLUTION WAS FOR THE 10 MILLION PERUVIANS WHO LIVE PRINCIPALLY IN THE SIERRA. MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE FOR THEM, HE CONTINUED, WHICH IS WHY ONLY A THIRD OR HALF OF THE REVOLUTION'S GOALS HAVE

BEEN REACHED.

4. MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT. A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE CONFERENCE, A PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INSTITUTE PROPOSAL WAS PUBLISHED PROVIDING FOR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT. UNDER IT, THE VARIOUS GROUPS (FARM ORGANIZATIONS, LABOR, MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES) WOULD SEND REPRESENTATIVES TO A MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY, WHICH IN TURN WOULD ELECT A MAYOR. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE PROPOSAL, VELASCO APPEARED DISPLEASED THAT THE QUESTION HAD SURFACED IN THE PRESS AND NOTED THAT THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAD YET TO STUDY THE MATTER. (COMMENT: SOME FORM OF ELECTIVE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT WOULD APPEAR TO BE THE FIRST STEP IN RESTORING POWER TO CIVILIANS. HOWEVER, NOT EVEN THIS STEP SEEMS IN THE OFFING GIVEN VELASCO'S IMPATIENCE WITH THE SUBJECT.)

6. COMMENT: THIS IS THE LAST OF FIVE EMBASSY CABLES ON THE HIGHLIGHTS OF VELASCO'S TALKATHON, PERHAPS A FIFTH OF WHICH WAS PUBLISHED IN THE LOCAL PRESS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LIMA00907
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750040-0830
From: LIMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750278/aaaacskw.tel
Line Count: 134
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 LIMA 809, 75 814, 75 849, 75 893
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 11 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <11 SEP 2003 by WorrelSW>; APPROVED <20 OCT 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT VELASCO'S JAN 29 PRESS CONFERENCE
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, PGOV, PE, (VELASCO ALVARADO, JUAN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006